

OBSERVATIONS
ON
HORSE RACES,
CARDS,
ATTENDING PLAY HOUSES,
AND
DANCING.

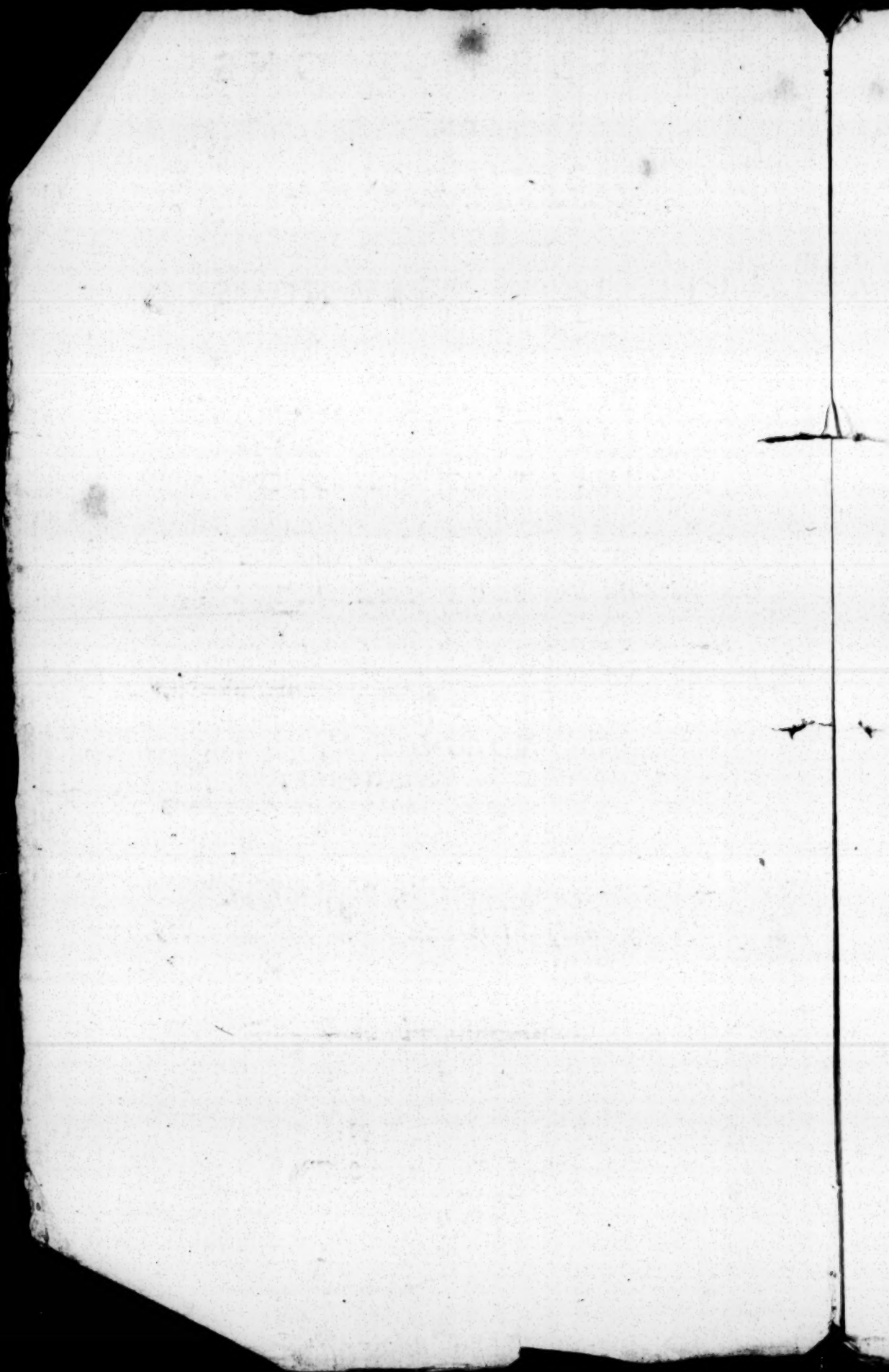
HUMBLY ADDRESSED
TO
Christians of every Denomination.

BY
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MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin, Rom. xiv. 23.
Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 1. Theff. v. 21.*

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN christianity was first established, the followers of the Lord Jesus suffered much persecution. They lived under the frowns and cruel reproaches of the ungodly. Many of them were called to seal the truth with their blood. But the persecution they endured did not hinder their progress in the divine life; they followed Christ *fully*, through evil and good report, in honour and dishonour. In all ages of the church, the sincere followers of God, have generally prospered the *most*, in seasons of persecution. It has driven hypocrites out of the church, forced the faithful to God, imploring help from his indulgent hand, and united them to each other, in the bonds of purest affection. They have grown up into Christ their living head daily, and increased in number continually.

When the Lord has given his people favour in the eyes of the world, and disposed the hearts of kings and governors to be favourable to them, giving them liberty to worship God according to their desire, it has *generally* happened, that a fatal lukewarmness has seized the hearts of ministers and people; they have slackened their hand in public and private duty; they have indulged flesh and blood too much; they have found occasions of quarrelling with each other. This has caused a number of evils to creep in among those who were *once* sincere. The end of their calling, *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*, has been, in a great measure, forgotten by them.

This has led them insensibly too near the world; at *first* they were afraid, but by *degrees* their fears were conquered,
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and they sank again into bondage. Some have however boldly withstood the *influence* of men and things, and have gone on their way rejoicing.

For many years these nations have had a glorious day of visitation. The gospel has been preached with success amongst many denominations of christians. We can *now* sit under our own vine, and under our own fig tree, none making us afraid. Very many in different places, are walking in the fear of God, and in the comforts of his holy spirit. They resolve, *Not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds; that they may prove, what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God,* which they ought to conform to in all things. But alas! this is only the conduct of a *few*, compared with the rest of the inhabitants of these nations. Most are for going an easy way to heaven, or not for going to that blessed place at all. You will find *Ministers* and private professors, pleading the lawfulness of a number of things, which are *evidently calculated* to destroy the life of God out of the soul; and lead men into the *spirit* of the world. Many games and institutions are sanctioned, under the character of *innocent diversions*, which would have been branded by our forefathers, with the name of *devilish amusements*. They would have opposed them with all their influence, and done every thing in their power to prevent their prevailing. In the writings of many eminent divines in the last century, we read of the *stand* they made against sin in all its gilded appearances; and how they behaved themselves in their various departments. They were living examples of the truths they taught.

When Mr Wesley first formed societies in different places in England, Scotland, and Ireland, he gave rules to his people, which are *eminently calculated* to help forward their salvation. He bore a *public* testimony against all kinds of gaming, and did every thing in his power, to keep *his* followers from countenancing, what I have considered in this pamphlet. He has *expelled* from his society, a number of persons, that would not lay them aside, after suitable admonition; he insisted on the preachers in his connection, bearing with him a public testimony against these evils, and pressed on them not to let any remain in our societies that were

son will *pretend*, that time is redeemed, in spending several hours every day while the races continue, on the horse course. We are not so far lost to every thing that is sacred, as to suppose that God *approves* of our spending it in that way. We are commanded to *work while it is day—work out our own salvation with fear and trembling—lest the night should overtake us* before our work is finished; lest death should meet us before our souls are prepared for heaven; and the eternal Jehovah should *banish* us from his presence for ever.

Many plead in their *excuse*, when you press on them to be earnest in seeking salvation, that their business takes up so much of their time, as to prevent them from doing many things they desire to accomplish; and yet these *very persons* can find sufficient time to attend a horse race, or any diversion that is agreeable to their mind. The persons that come from neighbouring places, may waste more time in this exercise than those who live where the races are held, but this is no sufficient excuse to squander away one moment of our lives, contrary to the appointment of our God.

3. Many accidents happen on these occasions; horses and carriages, crowding so very close on the ground, make it dangerous to be there. Children have been dashed in pieces, to *warn* parents of *their sin and danger*; old and young have frequently suffered. We hardly ever hear of races in any large town, but some, either on the course, or in going to, or returning from the races, have lost their lives; many who have escaped with their lives, are now carrying *marks* of their folly with them, wherever they go. This is a subject that can never be too much attended to. A man may go from his family, full of confidence he shall be secure, but by some *stroke* from the hand of God, may be brought back a breathless corpse. *In the midst of life, in such places, we are in death.* To be hurried suddenly in this manner from our friends, to appear before God, is a matter of the last importance. *We may cry peace to ourselves, when sudden destruction is at hand.* We may promise to ourselves length of days, and in *a moment* be cut off from among the living. We had an account a few days ago,
of

of the grand stand on a race ground in England, being crowded with people; and while those that were on the stand, and those that were under it were secure in their own imagination, the stand fell, and was the instrument of death to some, and of affliction and misery to very many. This has happened as a warning to others; and if it be properly considered, it will answer the end which the Lord designs. But if it should be slighted, those who harden themselves in sin, *may suddenly perish without remedy.*

4. Horse races are a kind of conventicle, to which thieves and loose women resort. They travel far to these places. They live by theft and wickedness in their journey. They watch the course by day, to pick the pockets of the unwary; and by night seek their gain from their own quarter. The men frequently watch the public roads, and rob those, that foolishly stay till darkness cover them; while the women are found in the lanes and streets of the city, *offering themselves to prostitution*, for hire. It is amazing what mischief is done in many places by persons of this character. If there be any places where races are in their infancy, they may not yet be crowded by persons of this character; but should they be continued, it is more than probable, *that thieves and whores will flock to them.*

5. The places where races are held, are generally very much disturbed by night, and by day. It is not safe to suffer children in the day time to pass on the streets. Hurry and noise are manifest in all places; and when the weary labourer wants to rest, and the afflicted are longing in the shades of the night for balmy sleep, both are prevented by the perpetual noise which is kept up in the streets. Many are assaulted in the streets, whom business forces from their habitations. Houses are disturbed and windows broken, to give the licentious pleasure. It would be dangerous to go out to ask a reason for their conduct. These disturbers of peace frequently stroll the streets, till the morning light appears, and then hide themselves like bats and owls, as though they were afraid of the light. When the hour returns to attend the race ground, they are among the first, to renew their crimes before their God.

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6. But these evils, great as they are found, are exceeded by those I shall now name. *Cheating and lying* are among the sins I refer to. If many go for their pleasure, others attend to deceive and cheat all, who are foolish enough to have any connection with them. It is often known by the owners of the horses and the riders, which horse will win the prize, before they start in the race. This has been manifest among gentlemen of the turf, *whose titles and characters* ought to have screened them from such villainy. In these *sham* races, the horse that is the most unlikely and the worst runner, is sure to reach the mark before the others. Every rider having his instructions acts in character; they whip and spur *apparently* with all their might, and at the same time, prevent their horses from outrunning the horse, that is to come first to the stand.

It is not for the prize that they act this base part, but to gain advantage another way. Every gentleman who wishes to try his fortune, as they phrase it, who is not in the secret, will readily bet against the horse that is to win. Many are employed themselves, and have others to help them, to accept the bets that are offered. These at some races amount to several thousands. If they go from the course unsuspected, they meet *to share the spoil* as soon as convenient; but if they are suspected, a thousand lies are told to cover their sin. The master and servant solemnly declare, every thing has been acted with the greatest uprightness; no fraud or injustice has been manifest on the occasion. Every one is ready to give his oath before a magistrate, that no deceit has been made use of in the race. If the secret is discovered, the parties concerned are exposed to the violence of a mob; or if they escape, to the lash of the law.

7. There is much blasphemy and drunkenness at these times, manifest on the course, and in the town or city. The name of God is irreverently made use of, by high and low, rich and poor; damning the eyes and limbs of those that are in the way, and often their souls to the devil, are the music of the course. If your heart be not hardened *through the deceitfulness of sin*, you cannot but tremble to hear all sorts of persons, striving to excel each other

in blasphemy : even children are heard to utter oaths *that ought to be punished by the judge.*

There are some who have no concern about the races that attend. Their object is to eat and drink as much as they are able to carry. The tents are crouded with persons of this character, even while the horses are running. Some have so much *self denial*, as to go to the door of the tent and see the race ; but between the heats, they return to their glass, till they are so drunk, when the horses go the last time round the course, as not to be able to leave their place. When the races are ended, in the tents, and in the town, drunkards of every age are found ; from the boy of 10, to the old sinner of 80 years. When drink dethrones reason, it is easy to see what will be the consequence. This shall be my last particular, on this part of my subject.

8. Slander and abuse, are plentifully bestowed by drunkards. They strive to provoke each other to wrath. They very seldom strive in vain. When this is the case, the most *horrid blasphemies* are heard on every side. They are like tygers in the field. They gnash on each other with their teeth, and appear resolved to try which is the *best fellow*, by fighting it out on the spot. Many on both sides are ready to encourage the parties concerned ; they strip and fight, to their eternal shame ; sometimes these quarrels end in the destruction of each other. One or both get such wounds and bruises, as hasten their dissolution. Many have been killed on the spot. In the midst of their drunkenness and wrath, they have been hurried into a world of spirits.

This account is not *exaggerated*, when applied to many places, where races are held. There are thousands that can witness the truth of every thing I have asserted. Other things might have been named, but these are the leading features of a horse race ; they are drawn from real life, and are not too much coloured in any part.

I shall now, in the second place, enquire, Is it lawful for christians to attend races ? I mean those, who are christians *in heart and life*. Those who have a living faith in the Lord Jesus, which works by love in all that have it, *purifying their hearts and bearing the fruits of the*
spirit

spirit, as well as every good work, in their life and conversation. Is it lawful for persons of this character, to mingle with the crowd on the horse course?

1. In the first place, it is evident, this institution is not of God; he never *appoints* any thing, which has so many evils connected with it. Is any man so bold as to affirm, that God has appointed races for the abuse and destruction of his creatures? He never appoints any thing but for his own *glory*, and the *happiness* of man. But none can suppose, that God is glorified by a horse race, or that mankind are made happy in these diversions. If God has not appointed them, they must spring from beneath. Do they naturally lead *the soul from God*, and into a number of sins that he abhors? Are they evidently calculated to destroy true religion out of the heart and life, and to help forward the future destruction of sinners? No person can doubt of these being their end, but those who are determined to shut their eyes against the light.

2. They are contrary to the tenor of the scriptures. We have no *positive declaration* against horse-racing, cock-fighting, &c. but we have many passages that include them. It is probable these vices have been found out since the scriptures were completed; but as they contain general precepts, that include a number of duties that are not particularly specified, so they declare against many things which have been invented by man, since the days of the Apostles. We shall find, on an *impartial examination*, horse races to be one of this number. St Paul says, *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, &c. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give offence to none. Abstain from the appearance of evil. Whatever is not of faith is sin.* These passages abundantly prove, that this is against the word of God. Can any man do this in the name of the Lord Jesus? Will he presume that God is glorified by his attending the horse race? Does it give no offence to any of the followers of Christ? Is there no appearance of evil in it? Can a man in the faith of Christ, mingle with sinners on a horse course?

3. Christians are forbid the races by the following passages. *Be not partakers of other men's sins. Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things;*

thing. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset you. They think it strange, that you run not with them to the same excess of riot. Take up your cross, deny yourselves. Be not conformed to this world. If these plain passages of scripture do not convince every person that reads them that horse races are offensive to God, there is little reason to suppose that the words of man will find a place in their hearts. If it be not a touching the unclean thing, a weight to the soul, partaking with other men in their sin, holding fellowship with the works of darkness, conformity to the world, &c. I am not able to determine what it is.

4. It is contrary to the practice of the apostles, and the practice of all who have lived godly in Christ Jesus, to the present day. The apostles were careful not to act any part, that would hinder the spreading of the gospel. St Paul says, *If eating flesh would offend my weak brother, I would eat no more flesh while the world standeth.* Eating flesh was every way consistent with the word of God. It might be necessary for St Paul in his excessive labour; yet he resolved to sacrifice this lawful article of food, rather than give offence. Attending horse races cannot be justified from the scriptures. It *very much* pains both Ministers and private Christians, who have the cause of God at heart; it emboldens persons that have good desires, to enter on a practice, which often proves fatal to their souls. It can be no great sacrifice, for a professor to make, to abstain from an horse race, provided there was no sin in it. If a man will not do this, to prevent offence from being given, he cannot have the same experience which St Paul enjoyed.

The church in all ages, has been exhorted to stand at a distance from the customs and fashions of this world.—Those who have lived to God, according to the light of the spirit of truth, have abstained from every thing of this nature. Search ecclesiastical history, and you will find that, many christians *might have saved their lives* by yielding to things as little sinful as attending a horse race; but they preferred death with a good conscience, to life with the reproach of their own hearts. Who are the christians that plead for horse races, and other things of this nature? Are they men after God's own heart? Devoted to his will

will in all things? Are they not rather those, who never knew the *saving power* of a living faith in Christ? Or those who *once had it*, but are now sunk into lukewarmness before God? Persons that are trimming between God and the world; who have *a name to live*, but are *dead while alive*. If this be the case, are they not enemies to the cross of Christ, while they plead for liberty to conform to the world, contrary to the design of the Gospel?

5. It is against the peace and happiness of christians. *Happy is the man that condemneth not himself, in the thing which God allows.* But God never does allow any thing contrary to his word, and the happiness of his people. If a man can go to a horse course, and say his conscience does not condemn him, it is *evident*, his conscience is asleep—Perhaps the violence he has done to his soul, has seared his conscience. If this be the case, he may be so *stupid* as to feel no remorse, and *laugh at those* who will not follow his example; but he is at the same time *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity.*

When we use our christian liberty, as far as the Lord allows, without countenancing sin, or condemning ourselves, we are truly happy. If two things offer, there is always a safe side. If I reason whether I shall go to the horse race or not, I am convinced, many things may be said of me by different professors. Some may stumble at my conduct. But if I resist the temptation, and refuse to go, none can be justly offended. I shall look up to God with confidence in prayer; have the answer of a good conscience; be an example in this to believers; and shall stop the mouths of gainayers. This is the safe side: Here I ought to conduct myself with the greatest care.

6. Races are against the *temporal, spiritual, and eternal* happiness of the people. If we wish their temporal happiness, we should avoid them. How many families are distressed for want of the labour that might have been passed through, and for want of the money that has been squandered foolishly away at these times! If we see the poverty, disease, and misery of our fellow creatures, occasioned by the races, ought we not to avoid them, *for their*

their good, and strive to prevent their attending them? If we love their souls, we shall seek to promote their happiness. We know their souls *cannot prosper* till they give up sin, and every thing that leads to it. This will lead us by *our example and advice* to engage them to avoid evil, or the appearance of it; and we shall at the same time seek to bring them to God by the Lord Jesus, that they may be made happy in him.

While they pursue evil, they are in danger of losing their souls. Death may find them on the horse course, and they may be eternally ruined. Our example and advice may prevent this evil. They may engage with us in the service of God, and we may all be saved with an eternal salvation. Nothing can be lawful, which will not admit of these three things:

1. A *solemn appeal to God*, that we are seeking his glory in what we do. *If our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light.* If we aim at *glorifying God, in our body and spirit which are God's*, we shall have the answer of a good conscience. But is it for the glory of God, that persons who call themselves christians attend a horse race? Can we appeal to God that we are seeking his glory in this exercise? Can you retire into your closet, and make this solemn appeal to the searcher of hearts? 'Eternal God, 'I have found mercy at thy hands through the Son of 'thy love; I have peace and liberty in my soul through 'his mediation; and now I wish to advance thy praise 'in all my thoughts, my words and actions. I appeal un- 'to thee my Father and my God, that I do not attend the 'races to gratify any vile principle in my heart; to 'keep myself from the reproach and persecution of the 'wicked; to keep up respect and honour from my 'friends and acquaintance; or from any other worldly 'motive, but *purely to promote thy glory* and save my own 'soul. I have no other end in attending these races, but 'to get good to myself, and to do good by my example and 'influence there. Thou who knowest all things, know- 'est, if it were not to accomplish these ends, I would not 'look toward the races.'

Would not such an appeal as this shock the most hardened wretch that attends there? Would it not be considered

ffered as an insult offered, not to man, but to him *that can kill the body, and destroy the soul in hell?* Would not every person that pretends to heart religion, be shocked if he heard any of his neighbours making such appeals?

But is it lawful to engage in any thing in which we dare not appeal to God, that these ends are the object of our aim? *Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, all is to be done to the glory of our God.*

2. In the second place, it is not lawful to enter upon any thing that we cannot first ask a blessing upon. Every thing is to be *sanctified to us, by the word of God, and by prayer.* When we go to our labour, journey on business, or walk for our health, we can *confidently* address the God of our mercies, to bless these exercises to us: we are not afraid or ashamed of doing it in public. But which of us could call our families or neighbours together, that a blessing from God may be sought *in fervent prayer*, on the horse race? Could you say, "Lord God Almighty, being conscious that *thine eyes are over the righteous, and thine ears attentive to their prayer*, we prostrate ourselves with our families at thy footstool, and beseech thee from our hearts, to *bless and sanctify* to us the horse race, to our present and eternal advantage. Without thy blessing, this exercise will not be serviceable to us. Let us feel our souls *edified and comforted*, while we see the horses run, hear thy name blasphemed, see sinners drunk, and fighting with each other. Let every thing that is manifest there, be for our edification and happiness. Let these children thou hast given us, who accompany us to the race ground, get such an *hatred of vice, and love of virtue* by what they see and hear, as may be for their eternal welfare?"

Would not such prayers, my brethren, be blasphemies before God? Would it not be the height of wickedness, to offer such petitions as these to the Almighty? If every thing is to be sanctified by prayer *that is lawful*, and you dare not pray for a blessing on the horse race, you need not hesitate a moment, to know whether it be sinful or not. And whoever ventures without examining the subject after this manner, when he has an opportunity of doing it, will find his heart to condemn him in due time.

3. Whatever we engage in, ought to be of such a nature, that should the Lord require a sudden account of our stewardship, we may be able to give up our *accounts with joy*. If death should find us at our lawful employ, in a journey, walking for the benefit of our health, or in any innocent recreation, we should meet him with boldness. As our life is in the hands of God, and he can take it when and where he pleases, it ought to be our study, to engage *only* in those things, that we know are according to his will. Which of us would be *reconciled* to meet death in a moment on the horse course? If we knew our departure was at hand, should we venture among a croud of sinners, to give up our spirits into the hands of God? I apprehend death would be the *king of terrors* to all sorts of persons, in that situation. He would be an unwelcome messenger to all employed on the race course at that time. And shall we venture upon an exercise that we dare not face death in? Shall we harden ourselves to such a degree, as to venture our life and our soul in a practice, which we would not die in for a thousand worlds? Depend on it, what I have now advanced, on this part of the subject, is according to the law and the testimony. It is according to the declaration of thousands, who have been living witnesses of the power of God to save.

I shall now, in the last place, answer some objections which are made against what I have advanced.

Obj. 1. "God has made these creatures for our pleasure and amusement, as well as to labour; and therefore there can be no crime in running them against each other on the course." It is granted, that God gives us many things in life for our pleasure and amusement; but he always sets *bounds* to what he allows. We find pleasure in eating and drinking. We are pleased and delighted with the works of nature and providence. We cannot justly infer from this, that running horses against each other, in the manner races are now conducted, is according to God. We are not to *abuse* his creatures for our pleasure. We are not to amuse ourselves by collecting such crouds of people together, *to violate the laws of God and man*, as is the case now where races are held.

Obj. 2.

Obj. 2. "Persons cannot always labour without some relaxation. It is necessary to have some recreation at certain intervals. The races afford us opportunity to accomplish both these ends." It is granted that relaxation from labour or study is necessary; but *it cannot be allowed* that the races answer this end to most persons that attend them. Many come miles from the country, to be present on these occasions. When they have returned to their families, after the fatigues of the journey and attending the horse course, they are *abundantly more wearied* than they would have been, in their daily labour: and even those who live in the places where the races are held, by harassing about on the course, &c. they return to their families very much fatigued. Besides, if we allow them to be a relaxation, they only answer this end a few days in a year. We need relaxation every day, and *must have it*, or nature would sink under her burden; but I apprehend, to attend races every day, would soon become a burthen, intolerable to bear.

It is not worthy of the name of recreation, when it is properly considered. The abuse of the good creatures of God which is manifest, the scenes of iniquity which are practised on every side, the temptations to which we are exposed in such a situation, the fatigues attending this exercise, with the loss of time and wasting of our money, (which ought to be applied to other purposes) is poor recreation, when weighed in the balance of sound reason. It is such recreation, as ends in *guilt and disappointment*. In the midst of this sport; *the heart is frequently sad*.

Obj. 3. "Many advantages are brought to the places where races are held." But are there not more disadvantages attending them? The publicans, and notorious sinners of many descriptions may reap much temporal gain on these occasions, but what gain do *masters and parents reap* while their children and servants neglect their duty, to attend the races? Many are the evils that attend such a concourse of people collecting together at these times. They cannot be outweighed, by advantages which *individuals* receive. None can compute the loss that is sustained, by business being neglected, money foolishly squandered away, accidents which happen, mischief that is done
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by wicked and unreasonable men, and a number of other things too tedious to enumerate.

Obj. 4. "Gentlemen of fortune and education, are the chief promoters of these exercises. The clergy of the established religion, and *ministers* of different denominations, attend. Can it be *supposed*, that these men would countenance any thing that is *strictly* evil?" But can it be supposed that gentlemen who promote horse races, are doing this under the influence of the spirit of God, and from a desire to promote his glory? Are not many of them openly and notoriously profane in their conversation? Do they not, in the sense of the scriptures, *live without hope, and without God in the world*? Are they not aiming at pelasure or advantage, in what they do? Is it not evident that *God and religion* are out of their minds, when they devise and attend the races?

Horse races are, it is true, *sanctified* by the presence of many, *that are called* the ministers of Christ. These gentlemen lead their flocks, by their doctrine and example, to attend. They will publicly declare, there is no harm in being present at the races. And to show *they believe* what they teach, they are among the first that assemble on these occasions. But can we suppose, that the *spirit of Christ*, which converts the heart, and gives ability to preach the gospel, should *lead the men* whom he inspires to attend a horse race? Are ministers acting under *his guidance*, when they go forth with a croud, *not to warn them to flee from the wrath to come*, but to strengthen their hands in iniquity? Are they not, by their conduct, going in the face of the scriptures, and *exposing* themselves and their flocks, to the wolf that seeks to devour? Is there not *evil* as well as the *appearance* of it, in their conduct? Do they not grieve the minds of those who follow God in sincerity, and discover a want of piety and self-denial, which ought to distinguish them from other men? They offend those, *for whom Christ died*; they embolden those who are doubtful, to stretch out their hand to evil; they debase their character; they sin against God in their attending, and expose *themselves* and their *flocks* to perdition. Should they die *without repentance*, they will have their *own and the blood of others* to answer for before God—While they speak smooth things, and countenance evil by their example,

example, it cannot be supposed, they are acting consistent with their character; but are doing work for the prince of darkness, while they profess themselves the disciples and followers of the prince of life and glory.

Ob. 5th. "If we do not commit any sin ourselves, but *just attend* while the horses run, and then return to our families, there can be no harm in this." You may imagine that your conscience is void of offence, if you go thus far, and no farther. You say the races would be run whether we attend or not. The same iniquity would be accomplished—And since this is the case, *why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?* There appears something plausible in this. But when we consider, if sinners entice, we are not so much as to *consent* to go with them, where they commit their sin; because our looking on, and being with them, is, in the sense of the scriptures, *partaking in their crimes*. It is *holding fellowship with the workers of darkness*. *We are commanded to turn our eyes from beholding vanity*. But when we attend a horse race, we go into the very face of almost every kind of vanity, and behold it with too much respect and approbation.

It is certain, a few christians keeping back from races will not exterminate them; but their *doing this*, may *weaken* the cause of the adversary. Many may be restrained by our authority; some by our example; and a multitude by our advice. It is both a *conniving* at, and a *countenancing* sin. No man can be innocent before God, who ventures boldly against the scriptures of truth; the *advice* and *example* of the apostles and others; and against the light of his own conscience.

My dear brethren, let the time pass suffice, wherein we have run with the many, in what *cannot be justified* before God. Let us now, while we have opportunity, *lay aside every weight, and the sin that most easily besets us*, and let us *run with patience the race which Jesus Christ hath set before us*. To do this, let us humble ourselves before God, for our past offences; renouncing our sins; our conformity to the world; our lukewarmness and pharisaical righteousness; and let us plead *from our heart*, for mercy and salvation in the Lord Jesus. Let us fly by faith to him, *who is the new and living way*, and let us believe *in hope, against hope*, till we feel redemption in his blood, the
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forgiveness of sins. Let us never rest, till we have a clear sense of our acceptance with God; the *spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.* Then, *forgetting the things which are behind, let us reach to those things which are before; let us press toward the mark, for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* If we do this, we shall never fall; but looking to Jesus the author, till he become the finisher of our faith, in due time an *abundant entrance shall be administered to us into the kingdom of God, where we shall receive glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life.* God grant that each of us may *so run in the christian race as to obtain* these things; that we may all be *happy and blessed, in his presence for ever—Amen.*

I shall just subjoin, a few brief observations on HUNTING, as it is a subject of the same nature; and then finish this discourse.

1. It encourages the preservation of creatures that are destructive to the interest of the farmer. In many places hares, partridges, pheasants, &c. are so numerous, that a great deal of corn is consumed to support them. And it is well known the mischief foxes do, where they are suffered to continue unmolested. Many farmers have their corn devoured in the field, and their poultry stolen out of their houses, and yet the thieves are not to be disturbed. Heavy fines are extorted from the farmer that breeds and nourishes many of these creatures, if he be found destroying them. Some landholders threaten their tenants with immediate expulsion, if they dare to kill a fox, though they may see him dragging their fowls to his den.

2. The dogs that are kept for the purpose of hunting, with the horses and men employed by different gentlemen, amount to a very considerable sum every year. Ought not this money to be better employed? Will gentlemen that squander away their property this way, and neglect the poor, and *charitable institutions*, be found blameless before God in the day of accounts? Will they not rather be found among those, that waste their Lord's treasure, and be condemned accordingly?

3. Where a gentleman chooses to hunt in many places, his

his will becomes law. Fifty or a hundred horsemen, with a number on foot, break hedges; leave open gates; frighten cattle to do themselves an injury, or fly for refuge into a neighbour's field; tread down corn, when it is promising to reward the toil of the husbandman; these with a number of other evils are manifest, when gentlemen follow the horn to the chase.

4. Many accidents frequently happen. Horses and men are wounded or killed. Foot people run till they are in a *bath of sweat*, and then cooling too fast bring on disorders, which often terminate in lingering pain, or death.

5. Many retire from the chase to eat and drink with the drunkard. The night is spent in carding and wickedness. Horrid blasphemies are heard in the field in the day time, and a number of vices are practised in the night season. — It is possible for a man to pursue the chase, and retire without being guilty of any notorious evil, yet when he considers the consequences that are connected with this business, he will see it unlawful to countenance, what is dishonourable in the sight of God, and exceedingly hurtful to our neighbour.

There is something very irrational in it. To see such a multitude pursuing an *innocent* hare, or a *guilty* fox, is agreeable to the nature of the dogs, but it shows a man in a *debased humiliating state*, when he so far renounces his reason, to mingle with the dogs in the cry and in the chase.

Wasting so much precious time, which ought to be better employed; doing to the farmer, in breaking his hedges, treading down his corn, &c. as we would not be done by; with every other circumstance attending the chase both to ourselves and others, is sufficient to convince us that it is not lawful before God.

May the God whom we profess to *honour* and *love*, give us such a *renewal of heart*, that we may delight in him, and in his ways; and may we find eternal things so powerfully impressed on our minds, that these things may never attract our attention. May we stand at a *distance* from every thing that would dishonour the name of our God, hinder our own peace, grieve our brethren, hurt our neighbours, or open the mouths of sinners to

re-

revile our religion; and may we so walk and live continually, that God may be glorified in all we speak and do, and we eternally saved!

O B S E R V A T I O N S

O N

P L A Y I N G at C A R D S.

I Am not sure who was the first inventor of cards. It appears he had some particular acquaintance with the nature of man, in his corrupt state. He saw what would engross his attention, and help him to waste his precious moments. The author has discovered some ingenuity in the construction of them; the different marks they bear; with the names he has given them. Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs, and Spades, are the names by which the different cards are known from each other. These are diversified in figure and number. The business of the player is, to shuffle these in his hand, cut one part of the pack from the other, and then deal out a certain number to every person that is engaged in the game. Laws are established, by which the parties know which card in the different games is more valuable than the rest. The person that has studied this business fully, and made himself master of all its parts, is considered as a champion in this art. But a man possessed of proper views into the powers and faculties of a human soul may ask, what *advantage* can be derived to any rational creature by this exercise? Does it *enlarge* the understanding, which is capable of habitual improvement, or answer any valuable end, in ennobling any faculty of the mind? Does a man obtain any *useful knowledge* by the hours he spends at cards? Do they make him a better man or a better christian? Are there advantages attending them to his business, his family, or himself? If there be no advantages to be had in playing at cards, what end is proposed in this exercise? My intention in these pages is, to consider the subject with candour and impartiality; and to show how

unworthy they are of the attention of a man who wishes to save his soul.

1. It is not reasonable for a christian to spend his time in such foolishness. Many lay aside business of importance and spend hours in this exercise, that they ought to spend in their labour. Others flock together after the service of the day is ended, and waste the night at the cards.— But many persons of independent fortune, consider themselves fully at liberty to use them, because they have no temporal business to engage in. An excellent author, referring to persons of this character, expresses himself in the following manner: ‘ We hope there is no harm in taking an *innocent game* at cards, reply a ridiculous party of superannuated ladies: gain is not our aim: we only play to kill time. You are not so well employed as the foolish heathen emperor, who amused himself in killing troublesome flies and wearisome time together. The deluge of rational creatures, much more of christians on the brink of the grave, is to redeem, improve, and foolishly enjoy time. But yours, alas! in the base irreparable loss of the invaluable treasure. Oh! what account will you give of the hours you neglect, and the talents you bury.’

And shall we kill each day? if trifling kill,
Sure vice must butcher: Oh! what heaps of slain
Call out for vengeance on us! time destroyed,
Is suicide, when more than blood is spilt.

YOUNG.

It is amazing how persons who pretend to rationality, should talk of *killing time*: and that they should enter upon this ridiculous method of destroying it. There are a thousand useful things to be known, which multitudes are ignorant of, who spend their time at the cards, without neglecting any business. If their fortunes have raised them above labour, and their time is their own, ought they not to lay out this talent in acquiring useful knowledge, in various branches of literature? Is it not dishonourable to their characters to be ignorant in civil and ecclesiastical history; in philosophy and astronomy; in geography, &c. but more especially in natural and revealed religion? While they know neither the *nature* nor the *design* of true
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christianity; nor have any particular knowledge of themselves, and the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, with other things of the greatest importance connected with these subjects; they are acting *exceedingly* out of character, to waste at the card-table, the precious moments, that might be so advantageously improved; and it is *madness of folly* for young people, whose time is principally taken up in labour, to waste a moment in gaming, that is so necessary for them to improve, for their temporal and eternal advantage.

Many young persons of both sexes are expert at the cards, but are ignorant of every thing that might be of service to them. Thousands of them cannot tell you one letter from another in the alphabet; others of them put you upon the rack, while they read the plainest and easiest psalm in the Bible. Writing and arithmetic are not known by many of this character; and those who have some little knowledge of these, are incapable of discoursing with you on the most necessary parts of history and philosophy. Now would it not be much more commendable for these persons, to lay aside the cards, and enter upon the study and practice of those things which are necessary for their welfare and happiness in life? Ought they not to improve the hours they can spare in matters of the greatest importance to their *character as Englishmen*? Is it not a reproach to our youth, blessed with such fine natural parts, to find them so ignorant in every thing that concerns their future advantage?

If half of the time that is wasted in idleness and at the cards, or other foolish amusements, was spent according to the plan I allude to, we should find persons in every station in life, capable of conversing with us, on subjects that are entertaining and useful. For *God's sake*, my young friends, for the sake of your *own* happiness and peace, as well as for the honour of your character, lay aside trifling and gaming, and now while you have time and opportunity, apply yourselves in your leisure hours, to those exercises, that will improve your minds, and mend your hearts.

When we consider ourselves as creatures capable of knowing and loving God; of being made wise unto salvation by the Lord Jesus; what a holy emulation should fire our breasts, to know the things which make for our
peace

peace as soon as possible! Every thing in religion is great and glorious; all the passages in the scripture that concern our salvation, are of the last importance; the key of knowledge is given to us in our own language: God will open the scriptures to us, and our understandings to comprehend their meaning, if we seek wisdom at his gracious hand.

From this blessed book, and from others written on the most necessary doctrines of the Gospel, we may learn what we are by nature and practice; how helpless and wretched we are in our present state before God; the necessity we are under of applying to Christ for pardon and sanctification. We shall know on what terms the Lord receives returning sinners; how to apply in the name of Jesus to the Throne of Grace, to plead the promises which are yea and amen in him; how we may believe in him, and love one another; how we may exercise ourselves to godliness, to have a conscience void of offence to God and man. In a word, how we may *glorify God, in our bodies and spirits which are his; and be found in Christ without spot and blameless*, when we are called out of this world.

It is not the labouring poor that are ignorant of these things only, but many in advanced stations in life. Many that have lived a number of years in the world in affluent circumstances, have spent their time so foolishly, that they cannot answer the plainest questions in history, philosophy, or divinity. Most of their time has been spent in eating, drinking, dressing, and rising up to play. The cards have had a great share in the precious hours which they have wasted before God; and for which they will soon have to give an awful account.

Have *superannuated* ladies and gentlemen nothing else to do, than to waste or kill their time at a card table, or in any other exercise equally ridiculous? Many of them have seen threescore years in the world—they are within a step of death. It is to be feared, the greatest part of them are found in their sin and in their blood. They never seriously sought (and therefore cannot have found) *peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*. Their heart is yet unchanged. They have no true ideas of the new birth unto righteousness, which is necessary to prepare the soul for the kingdom of heaven.

And yet in this *deplorable state*, they cry out, *a little more sleep; a little more slumber; a little more folding of the hands together to sleep*. Persons in advanced age, ought immediately to lay aside every weight, and their besetting sin. They ought to turn to God and seek full salvation in Christ Jesus, while the lamp of life continues to burn. It is the one thing needful. They ought to make it their business, to secure redemption in the blood of Jesus, and holiness of heart before God, as soon as possible. No person in any station of life, has time to waste at the cards. We have *to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*, while God is *working in us by his holy spirit to will and to do of his good pleasure*. We may all adopt the following lines of the poet for our own:

No room for mirth or trifling here,
 For worldly hope or worldly fear,
 If life so soon is gone;
 If now the judge is at the door,
 And all mankind must stand before
 Th' inexorable throne.

2. At the cards, and other games of the same nature, many evil principles are encouraged and strengthened in our souls. This is a soil which nourishes and feeds them exceedingly. To instance in a few of them. Pride, that *hellish principle*, which is so contrary to God and our happiness, grows rapidly in this garden. When a man has acquired skill in the games that are played, above his fellows, he is greatly delighted with his superior understanding. If he find success attends his efforts, and he can outwit his fellows, he is greatly exalted in his excellence. His companions use every mean in their power to be equal to him, and are exceedingly mortified in their disappointment. This principle will show itself in all classes of gamesters. The more it is encouraged, the more it prospers in the soul. Covetousness is so hateful an evil, that most renounce it in profession. This evil may not be predominate in many that attend the card table. *Superannuated ladies and others*, whose chief end in playing is *to kill time*, may think themselves free of it. But every impartial observer must see, that this evil prevails in most gamesters. It induces thousands to enter on this exercise.

exercise. It discovers itself in all their conduct. The steps they take while exercised in the game, with the joy or sorrow that is visible in their countenance, according to the success they have, justifies my assertion. Envy, evil-furmsing, discontent, impatience, anger, &c. &c. are all encouraged here. Does not he who loses, envy the success of the man that is benefited by his loss? Though his companions act uprightly according to the rules of the game, yet does he not surmise they have cheated him? If a train of losses follow each other, does he not manifest his discontent in lively colours to all his companions? Does he not lose the government of himself, and make all in his presence unhappy, by his impatience? Anger boils up in his heart, and leads him to speak unadvisedly with his lips.

It is the duty of every christian to put off the old man with his deeds; to seek the destruction of every temper that militates against our happiness. Whatever would strengthen the evils of our heart should be *carefully* avoided. And whatever would *weaken* their influence and *hasten* their destruction, should be attended to with the greatest care. It is evident that every species of gaming, *and cards in particular*, prevent that sanctification of heart, which the scriptures declare, is absolutely necessary for our salvation; and greatly encourages every principle, that fits the soul for eternal destruction. Since this is *evidently* the case, no man ought to call cards an innocent diversion. They waste our precious moments, that ought to be improved in acquiring useful knowledge, and they lead us *insensibly*, farther and farther from God as they are continued; hastening the ruin and misery of body and soul for ever.

3. It is hardly possible to continue in this exercise without actual sin. Cheating is a vice that is almost inseparable from the card table. It is become so common, that the evil of it does not *strike us*, as it ought to do. Persons of character and fortune, will give place to *base* and *knavish* tricks, to over-reach each other. It is hardly possible to cheat without discovering *some* appearance of it to others. This leads the parties that suppose themselves injured, to complain. The guilty, to *screen their*

villainy, deny point-blank what they have done. A thousand lies are called in to cover their wickedness, from their brethren in iniquity. If the injured party be hard to convince, *solemn* appeals to God, and *solemn* oaths are brought in, to confirm their false testimony. Some will wish their souls *damned to hell*; or that *the Devil may fetch them* in a moment, if they have acted contrary to uprightness; while their conscience witnesses against them. To these vices, others are frequently added: drunkenness often crowns the whole.

If several things which I have named, are not applicable to some parties of gentlemen, and if ladies in general can acquit themselves of the most weighty of these charges, they will probably find, on strict examination, that cheating and lying are not altogether banished from their company. If many or all of these vices are connected with playing at cards, how can any person who values his own salvation, and the happiness of others, countenance them? Should we not renounce them with *indignation*, resolving by the grace of God, to have nothing to do with them in the future? The very possibility of being drawn into sin by them, should lead us to avoid them with the greatest care. Our example and advice may prevail with others, to have nothing farther to do with them.

4. Besides the evils I have named, they often introduce unwary youth into such company as they ought ever to avoid. Persons of advanced age have often been swindled out of their money, by going too near a company of sharpers. The *diabolical* steps which these men pursue, merit the displeasure of God to a very high degree, and ought to be *punished by the judge* as much as felony. When once a spirit for gaming is created in the heart, it is difficult to quench it. The more men give themselves up to it, the more the desire increases. It has led many to forget their God, and to cast off all pretensions to religion. They have hardened themselves in their wickedness to such a degree, as even to spend the sabbath in gaming, instead of worshipping the Almighty. Many have wasted their fortunes, lost their character, been forced to live as fugitives and vagabonds in the world; and have been driven,

driven, by the *force of temptation* and the *wickedness of their heart*, to rob on the highway, and ended their days on a gallows by gaming. Let none plead *innocent*, who allow themselves to kill time this way; but rather determine by the grace of God to own their folly, renounce their cards, and every species of gaming; and seek mercy for their souls, while mercy may be found.

I know many reasons are given by different persons to countenance what they love, but as I said of horse races, so I will venture to affirm of gaming; If we cannot appeal to God, that we seek his glory in it; if we cannot in secret, in our families, and in public, plead for a blessing on the cards, &c; if we would not meet death in these exercises, they cannot be lawful. Whoever *pleads for them*, pleads against his *own* conscience, and *against his God*.

Let us value our souls in future, and never by any means neglect our great salvation. Let us buy up the seasons others spend foolishly, to seek after useful knowledge: *above all*, to seek an *evangelical* knowledge of our acceptance with God, in the Lord Jesus. Then our hearts will spurn every thing that would lead us from him. We shall have no fellowship with the works of darkness, but shall reprove others for giving place to them. We shall warn them of their danger, and call on them in the name of our divine master, *to repent, and turn to God, doing works meet for repentance*. We shall have true happiness in wisdom's ways. While we live to God, our conscience will be kept *void of offence* to him, and to all. We shall be ready to accomplish every good word and work, which are required at our hands. God will help us to live, as *lights* in the world; as a *city set on a hill, which cannot be hid*. We shall ornament our christian profession, and living a few days here to promote the glory of our heavenly Father, we shall be glorified in his presence eternally.

May the blessed Spirit of God *convert* all our hearts to true religion! May he change us into the image of God, from glory to glory continually! And may we all be found in affliction and death, with oil in our vessels, with our lamps burning, that we may enter with the bridegroom of our souls, to the great marriage supper he has prepared, and sing praises in his presence forever!

A FEW

A FEW OBSERVATIONS

ON

PROFESSORS OF RELIGION

ATTENDING

PLAY-HOUSES.

IT often happens when our mind is *biased* in favour of any thing, it is hard to convince us of the evil of it; though it may appear particularly so to every unprejudiced person. Attending play-houses, is considered by the *most pious christians* of all denominations, as *exceedingly* contrary to the gospel of Christ. Yet there are many who declare themselves to be the followers of the Son of God, who plead for this liberty; and whether the *gospel* or their *ministers* grant it or not, they are resolved upon going. This has induced me to examine the subject at this time, and led me to *appeal* to every man's conscience in the sight of God, how far it is lawful to attend such places.

1. Many of the plays which are acted, are *evidently* calculated, to *sap the foundation* of natural and revealed religion. There are many excellent tragedies, written by Shakespear and others. Many of them are taken from real life. Nothing but the colouring is fictitious. These are instructing and affecting. Many have read them, not only innocently, but to their advantage. But these may be read in *private* or with a few *select friends*, without crouding the play-house. When any of these are acted publicly, they are generally followed by a farce, which is eminently designed, to eradicate every virtuous principle from the human heart. After an audience has been dissolved in tears, by a *real history* under affecting colours, their minds are led to something ridiculous. Many of these pieces are exceedingly obscene. No modest person of either sex, can hear them without blushing. If the same things were said to them alone, they would be alarmed; and *fly from*
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the person that dared to insult their modesty. But by mingling with the croud they drink in the hellish poison, and are pleased under their deadly wounds.

What are Comedies, but pieces particularly designed to corrupt the heart, and lead us to perdition? Is not *religion* with its *sincere followers* burlesqued; sin mocked at; and a number of things recommended, which are dangerous to think on? Are not different schemes artfully set before the listening throng, to bind them faster to the god of this world, and make them more faithful in his service? Do not many practise what has been advanced, to the destruction of both body and soul? It would be easy to select passages from the comedies which are published, to justify what I assert. But they are so far from being worthy of our notice, that it would be to the *honour of christianity*, to have them banished from these nations, which bear the name of Christ.

2. They are acted by persons of the worst of characters. There may be some exceptions. In large cities, there may be persons on the stage, who are not lost to every thing that is sacred. They may abhor a number of crimes which others give place to. But are *the best of them*, upright followers of the Lord Jesus? Is it not *evident*, that they sow the *seed of eternal death* wherever they publicly act? If ministers are Ambassadors for God, they are Ambassadors for the prince of darkness. The measures they adopt, and the steps they take, are calculated to banish true religion from all that attend their ministrations. And if this be the case with those that are the most respectable, what are these strolling players, but the basest of men, and the worst of women connected together? They may be said (without a bold metaphor being unsuitably applied,) to be the *offscouring* of all things. They are frequently guilty of a number of vices, in the places where they go. Many of the men have been detected in crimes, that are punished by the judge; while the women vilely entangle a number of promising youths, in their most deadly snare. Such a train of sins are connected with them, that it would be to the honour of the magistrate to prevent their *pernicious* influence. Is it possible to countenance them in their wickedness, and be innocent before God? Can we *pretend* to follow the Lord Jesus in the re-
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generation, and at the same time help forward the cause of men of this character? If we value our own character, we ought to stand at a distance from them, and neither help nor countenance them, *in any respect*. We should plead with God to remove them, as fervently as we should plead for the removal of the plague, if it were destroying on the right hand and on the left. It becomes us to take every step in our power, to *repress this train* of evils, if we regard our own, and the happiness of others.

3. If we consider the persons that attend, we shall find fresh motives to keep from their company. We find a convention of sinners of all ages and characters, met for the *sole purpose* of diverting themselves by something that shall be acted. God is not in all their thoughts. Jesus Christ is not revered, but his blood is trod underfoot by them. The spirit of holiness is despised and rejected. Every thing that is light and trifling is acceptable to this company. If instead of the actors, *a minister of Jesus Christ* should draw aside the curtain, step forward, and propose to teach them *the good and the right way*; would not a shameful indignation rise in every heart? Would not *loud murmurs* be heard from every quarter? Instead of admitting him to go forward, would they not say, it is not this man, but Barabbas we want? They would infinitely prefer *a robber*, (as many playactors are) who would show them the way to destruction, than the best preacher in the world, who should attempt to preach Christ to them, who is the *way*, the *truth* and the *life*. Are we not joining the wicked, and giving them the right hand of fellowship, if we go with them to the worship of Baal? Our example strengthens the hands of the fearful, and our conduct amazingly hurts the cause of Christ. If we could engage persons of every character to hear the gospel, they might be caught in its net; and by yielding to the Lord Jesus, be made happy partakers of the grace of life. It would be possible to assemble with them to the glory of God, and our own salvation. But if we go on *forbidden* ground, and mingle with the *worst of sinners* in an exercise that is *offensive* to God; we are in the utmost danger of perishing with them in their iniquities. Nothing can prevent our ruin, but *coming out from among them,*
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being separate; determining not to touch their unclean things; and seeking pardon and salvation at the hands of God, by the faith of Christ. If we do not submit to this, destruction from God will overtake us. We shall be cast off from his presence for ever.

4. The money that is foolishly spent, and the time that is wasted on these occasions, are talents we shall have to be accountable for, in the great day of judgement. We have these favours lent to us by a gracious God, who charges us to occupy till he come. Every *farthing* of our money, and every *moment* of our time, ought to be spent according to his appointment. If we are blessed with more of the good things of life, than supply the wants of our families, we are commanded *to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, &c.* If we have more hours than are necessary to spend in labour, and in refreshing nature according to the appointment of God, we have *public* and *private* devotions marked out for us. We are likewise *to visit the sick and those that are in prison*, giving them such advice and temporal aid, as our ability admits of. Now is it possible for a man to waste his time and his money at a play-house, and be accomplishing these blessed ends? Is he not *wronging* the poor and afflicted, as well as his own soul? Will he not have a dreadful account to give before God, when he stands in the judgment; unless repentance take place before death close his eyes? If there were no other evil than this, it will be sufficient to banish us from the *presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power for ever.*

Many persons attend plays, that cannot do it without *wronging* their creditors or their families. Perhaps an honest tradesman is wronged of his due, and brought into distress by your prodigality; or your family is suffering for want of the money you foolishly waste in diversions. You cannot afford to give any thing to support the gospel, or to help forward any charity; but you can spare *two or three times the sum*, (which might be expected in charity from your circumstances) in gratifying a principle that ought to be destroyed.

5. Attending at the theatre, has an amazing influence on the heart and life. The *good* impressions we received in our childhood and youth, are often effaced. The remorse
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and conviction we experienced, by the instructions of our parents or hearing the gospel, are banished from our heart. We say to God, *depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* We say to conviction and remorse, *go your way for the present, when I have a more favourable opportunity, I will send for you.* Many objects engross our affection, and lead our hearts far from God. While we are in this state, we shun the company of *ministers or christians*, who would warn us of our danger, and help us to escape out of the snare of the devil. We meet with companions according to our desire, and strengthen each others hands in wickedness. This is a most deplorable state. *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. He that hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly perish, and that without remedy.* The possibility of these things attending the play-house, should induce us *to escape for our life to the God of our mercies*, that when sinners intice, we may have power to withstand. Let us ever remember, if death should find us there, nothing but a miracle of grace could save us. And we have no reason to hope, that *such a miracle* would be wrought on us, as we have so long rejected the council of God against ourselves.

6. It is dangerous for weak persons to attend. If they pay any regard to their health, they ought never to come near a play-house. The heat of the place, occasioned by the crowds that attend; the hours they are confined in such a wretched situation; and the *damp night air* in their return, all combine to hasten their dissolution. Many whose health was remarkably good, have found such effects from the causes I have named, as have terminated in affliction and death. If we regard the welfare of our body or soul; if we study our happiness here or hereafter; we shall determine by the grace of God, neither to *touch* nor *taste* in any degree, what is attended with such pernicious consequences.

We shall buy up our time for the best of purposes, determining, *if we live, to live only to God.*

Let us fix it in our heart, never to give place for a *moment* to any temptation, that would in the least expose us to so many miseries. Let us beseech the living God, to preserve us from every *appearance of evil*, that we may have his

his favour continually resting on us. And since we cannot mingle with a croud of sinners, in the play-house, to the glory of God, let us mingle with the *followers of the Lord Jesus*, in all their acts of devotion. As we cannot stretch out our hand to this forbidden fruit, consistent with our high vocation, let us stretch out our hands to God in mighty prayer, and his blessing will descend upon us, according to the desire of our heart. May he keep us from all kinds of evil, *that it may never grieve us!* May he conduct us by his *unerring wisdom* in all our ways, and at last admit us *into his presence with exceeding joy*, that we may sing *hallelujah to God and the Lamb for ever and ever!*

As ORATORIOS are so nearly related to the subject I have been considering, I shall just make a few remarks on them in this place. Because passages from the scriptures are chosen, that are amazingly sublime, and set to music of an enchanting nature, many suppose, there can be nothing evil in attending: Nay, thousands think they do God service by being present. This seems a gilded snare of the enemy, designed to lead aside the people of God. If the words are the best in the bible, and the tunes which are sung the best in the world, who are employed in singing them? Are they the *sincere* followers of the Lord Jesus; who can sing with the spirit and with the understanding also? Or are they penitent sinners seeking mercy through the blood of the cross? No. They are sinners in general, and sinners of the worst character. They will blasphemously take the most sacred passages of scripture into their *unhallowed* lips, and shout the praise of God before thousands. While they are engaged in this work, there is not the least sign of piety in their countenance or in their gestures. When the business of singing is ended, they prepare for the stage in the evening. In a morning they sing like *nightingales* the praises of God, and in the evening the most obscene songs. They are like the fountains St James speaks of; they send up *bitter and sweet waters*. Their tongue is employed to bless and to curse God. Can any person suppose, that men of this character, are employed by the living Jehovah in this work? Does he not say to the wicked, What hast thou

and conviction we experienced, by the instructions of our parents or hearing the gospel, are banished from our heart. We say to God, *depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* We say to conviction and remorse, *go your way for the present, when I have a more favourable opportunity, I will send for you.* Many objects engross our affectious, and lead our hearts far from God. While we are in this state, we shun the company of *ministers or christians*, who would warn us of our danger, and help us to escape out of the snare of the devil. We meet with companions according to our desire, and strengthen each others hands in wickedness. This is a most deplorable state. *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. He that hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly perish, and that without remedy.* The possibility of these things attending the play-house, should induce us *to escape for our life to the God of our mercies*, that when sinners intice, we may have power to withstand. Let us ever remember, if death should find us there, nothing but a miracle of grace could save us. And we have no reason to hope, that *such a miracle* would be wrought on us, as we have so long *rejected* the council of God against ourselves.

6. It is dangerous for weak persons to attend. If they pay any regard to their health, they ought never to come near a play-house. The heat of the place, occasioned by the crowds that attend ; the hours they are confined in such a wretched situation ; and the *damp night air* in their return, all combine to hasten their dissolution. Many whose health was remarkably good, have found such effects from the causes I have named, as have terminated in affliction and death. If we regard the welfare of our body or soul ; if we study our happiness here or hereafter ; we shall determine by the grace of God, neither to *touch* nor *taste* in any degree, what is attended with such pernicious consequences.

We shall buy up our time for the best of purposes, determining, *if we live, to live only to God.*

Let us fix it in our heart, never to give place for a *moment* to any temptation, that would in the least expose us to so many miseries. Let us beseech the living God, to preserve us from every *appearance of evil*, that we may have
his

his favour continually resting on us. And since we cannot mingle with a croud of sinners, in the play-house, to the glory of God, let us mingle with the *followers of the Lord Jesus*, in all their acts of devotion. As we cannot stretch out our hand to this forbidden fruit, consistent with our high vocation, let us stretch out our hands to God in mighty prayer, and his blessing will descend upon us, according to the desire of our heart. May he keep us from all kinds of evil, *that it may never grieve us!* May he conduct us by his *unerring wisdom* in all our ways, and at last admit us *into his presence with exceeding joy*, that we may sing *hallelujah to God and the Lamb for ever and ever!*

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to do with my law ? Is it not *evident*, that gain is the godliness of these persons ? They put on a *mask* of religion, and sing the praises of God to make merchandize of the people.

2. They profane the house of God by their conduct. Every church is set apart for divine worship. It ought not to be occupied in any way contrary to the will of God. The worship of the Almighty is to be *sanctified* to the people, by the house of God being kept pure. Would it not be considered as contrary to God and the scriptures, for a church to be employed as a market-house, where people might buy and sell at any time, if they did not interfere with divine service ? If a church were let for the purpose of learning soldiers their exercise, or any thing else of this nature, it would be considered as a great offence. But if they should be let for dancing schools to be kept in ; for players to act their tragedies and comedies in, you would be more abundantly affected. And yet these men that profane the scriptures, and sing to the dishonour of God, are suffered to occupy churches devoted to his service, in so improper a manner. If they were to sing such songs as are calculated to suit their corrupt hearts, you would spurn them from your places of public worship ; but because they *mask* their designs under an appearance of religion, they are considered as worthy of being *patronized* by ministers and their people.

Is it in the heart of those who establish, and those who attend these recreations, to worship the living God ? Do not thousands flock together from various quarters, with *evident marks* of their intention being contrary to God ? Persons attend the church on these occasions, that never hear the gospel of the grace of God publicly preached. If all that attend were brought together to join in *fervent prayer and praise* before God, to hear his blessed word preached ; and were to come to, and go from the church, with decency and seriousness ; then we might pronounce their innocence and uprightness. But while the *vilest of the vile* are employed in singing, and crowds of sinners brought together from no motive of a religious nature, God is dishonoured ; his aname is profaned ; the conscience of sinners contract fresh guilt ; and the destruction of all the parties concerned, is hastened apace.

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3. The duties that are neglected; the time that is wasted; and the money that is foolishly spent; are sufficient proofs of their sinfulness. It is not only religious duties but temporal engagements which are neglected. Business of the greatest importance is laid aside, to the injury of trade, and the welfare of families. That money, which ought to be laid out as a talent to promote the glory of God, is perverted to *serve in accomplishing* such ends, as are contrary to his will. Is it possible for us to plead our innocency, while we waste our precious talents, and hazard our salvation? If our money and time were spent according to the appointment of God, when he comes in the Judgment, we should hear him say, *come, ye blessed of my father, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.* But what shall we hear when we appear at the bar of the Judge of quick and dead? Will he not say, *thou hast been unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will intrust to thee the true riches?* or rather, *I know you not, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.* Instead of feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, and visiting and relieving the prisoner in his distress, thou hast encouraged men of infamous lives; thou hast fed and cloathed them contrary to my will; thou hast strengthened their hands in wickedness: therefore receive thy reward with them. *Go together into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*

4. Many that attend the oratoris in the church, attend also the plays which are acted in the evening.

This is attended with a double expence, and with an additional wasting of time. These artful men have two strings to their bow; and shoot their arrows with success from both. Their scheme is, to draw as much advantage to themselves as possible. As they come under the character of the *sweet singers of Israel*, it is natural to suppose, many that attend in the church, will attend in the playhouse also. They may think these men that sung the praises of God with such particular melody, cannot act any play but what will be consistent with the subject of their former exercises. But alas! they can turn the tables, and act with more zeal in the cause of the devil, than they can in the *hypocritical* service of God, they so lately engaged in. Here they are in their proper element. They

act freely and naturally. Before they appeared in a work that did not suit the frame of their heart. But now, their whole soul is engaged in the cause of their *own master*.—While you attend their diversified exercises, you will find your heart insensibly drawn from God; and the things that make for your peace will become insipid to your taste. You may be led by degrees to cast off the fear of God, and enter upon such scenes of iniquity as will hasten your final destruction.

Some *unthinking professors*, may go once or twice without examining the subject, and because they *suppose* their eye is single, all will end well; but if they were to reflect for a few moments on the nature and design of this institution, they would see it their duty to stand at a distance from every thing of this nature. If they rush forward because it is agreeable to their own views of religion, and shut their eyes against the light of truth, they *most certainly* grieve the good Spirit of God, and bring guilt upon their conscience.

We should bring every thing to the law and the testimony; and what does not agree with both, should be renounced for ever. We could not stand in doubt on this subject, were we only sincere in examining it before God. We should see the snares that are hid under this appearance of religion, and should shun them with abhorrence.

If you only go with christian friends to the church; endeavour to raise your heart to God in singing; and when the service is ended, return to your families without going near the play-house; this is not sufficient to excuse you. The institution is contrary to God. It is transacted by those who are his enemies. It is designed to make merchandise of the people. It has a number of evils connected with it; and most certainly leads many from the truth. Whatever institution has the glory of God for its object, and the good and happiness of mankind; we should do every thing in our power to promote it. But whatever has *evidently* for its object, the dishonour of God, and the temporal and eternal misery of his creatures, we should avoid it with all our heart.

It is our duty *to prove all things, and only hold fast which is good*. We are *to try the spirits*, to know which way they design

design to lead us. If we submit to these directions, we shall shun the snare of the fowler; walk in the light as God is in it, and have the blood of Jesus Christ his son, to cleanse us from all sin. Our peace will flow as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea. We shall then sing the Lord's song *while in this wilderness*, with acceptance. We shall *return to Zion with singing*, and shall in due time *obtain joy and gladness, where sorrow and sighing cease for ever*. May we all have to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, in the presence of God, thro' eternal ages!—Amen.

A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON DANCING.

GOD has made us capable of knowing and loving himself. In the *bloom of youth*, we are capable of understanding and knowing the God of our mercies. It is the duty of parents to teach their children the good and the right way, as soon as their minds are capable of attending to instruction. It is their duty also to withhold them from every thing that would prevent their knowing and loving God. Dancing is become so customary that, in the higher circles of life, a gentleman or lady that wants this accomplishment, are considered as wanting part of their education. Many are led by the stream of custom to think their children will be neglected, unless they are taught to dance, before they make their appearance in the world. This induces them to hate every thing that is said against this amusement, and engages them to plead for it with all their soul. I hope all who read these lines, will endeavour to lay aside *prejudice* for a few moments, and weigh the subject *impartially* in their own breast. As we are commanded to *train up our children in the way that they should go*, we should

not on any account, take one step in their education, which cannot be justified in the sight of God. It should be our determination in *doubtful cases*, to err if possible, on the right side. There is always something that will convince us which is the safest side of the two; and if we act according to our reason and conscience, we shall choose that, which upon strict examination, is most likely to be for the glory of God. In this case we shall always walk worthy of our great vocation.

There is some end which parents propose to themselves in sending their children to a dancing school. It is generally supposed, this is done to make them capable of appearing in company to advantage. Very few parents propose no other end than their learning to dance. But would it not be possible to learn children how to enter a room where company is, and how to leave it with propriety, without a dancing master being their instructor? Might they not learn every part of genteel behaviour, without being taught to dance? Are there not many in the world, who never were taught this art, that behave with the greatest politeness wherever they go? There are evils attending this exercise, which ought particularly to be considered by every parent.

1. A good deal of their choicest time is spent in attending it. How many hours are foolishly spent in learning the different instructions which the master gives! It is not the hours which are spent in dancing at the school which are lost only, but it takes up the minds of children to such a degree, that their learning and other exercises are frequently injured by it. Boys neglect their writing and accounts, while girls refuse to attend with diligence to the duties of their calling. Parents complain of their children not improving at the school, but forget they have been the cause, by suffering them to learn to dance.

2. Perhaps wasting of time is the least evil in this business: money is foolishly spent in upholding it. The dancing master has his wages; and decent apparel must be provided. Tradesmen wish for their daughters to appear equal to those in superiour life. This creates an expence, which is contrary to the happiness and welfare of the family: their circumstances are hurt by this waste. And
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all they can propole with their children in marriage, is nothing more than a few fine cloaths to make them appear as ladies, while the *one thing needful* to constitute them such in reality, is wanting. Should it not affect our circumstances in the least, can we answer it to God in the day of accounts, to have wasted so much of the talents he intrusted to our care?

3. The health of many children is considerably injured by it. When young ladies are in the bloom of life, and promising to bless their parents with their services for many years, they may by dancing destroy a good constitution; languish in pain and misery; and return to their native dust before they have reached the strength of their days.— Children of a weakly constitution, who are threatned with a decline, should by all means avoid dancing. If the health of our children may be injured, and their destruction hastened by their dancing, are we acting as parents ought to do, if we suffer them in the prospect of these evils to enter upon this exercise? While they are under us, we are in a great measure accountable for their conduct. When they have it in their power without our influence to engage in this art, and *will do it* against our advice, the sin will lie at their own door. But should we suffer them to do it while we have power to restrain them, and their health be impaired, we shall be answerable for this at the tribunal of the Son of God. And what bitter reflections will take place in our minds, if we should have to follow our lovely children to the grave, that have been hastened thither by our means? Then, like Rachel, we shall weep for them, and refuse to be comforted, because they are not. The bare probability of this being the case, should lead us to spurn every temptation, that would expose them to affliction and death.

4. But it is more dangerous in a moral sense than in any other. It *feeds* the corruptions of their nature, and is a *bar* in the way of their salvation. Every evil should be *checked* in its first appearance, if possible. When we perceive pride, envy, anger, self-will, &c. it is our duty to crush these evils in the bud as much as we can. But sending our children to a dancing school, is the very place where they will grow and multiply. It is like an *hot-bed*

to

to the evils of their heart. Their pride will increase prodigiously very soon. It will discover itself in their words; their looks, and all their gestures. They will assume an *air of importance* in the presence of their parents and others, which is contrary to what ought to be manifest in persons of their age. They will be impatient, if you oppose them in any thing. They will murmur if their dress and every thing belonging to them, is not equal to others. You will find anger, like a secret fire, burning in their heart, if every thing is not just according to their mind. If you use every means in your power to repress these evils, they will grow in the unchanged heart; but when you suffer them to be nourished with every indulgence that facilitates their growth, you cannot be clear in the sight of God.

5. When children are indulged according to their desire, before reason is properly in exercise, the corruptions of the human heart make a rapid progress. Passion, instead of reason, rules in their breast. Suffer young ladies to attend the dancing school till they are expert in this art, and you will find them desirous of making an appearance in public. They long to show their ability in this exercise to their friends.

But it is become unfashionable for a young lady of sixteen, to dance with one of her own sex. She must have a male partner. When once the fence is broken down, it is hard repairing it. Many parents have suffered their beautiful daughters to join their neighbours in the dance, but have had sufficient cause to repent of it, to the end of their lives. Connections are formed contrary to the will and advice of parents and friends. Many times restraint only *inflames* affection. Reason loses its place. Passion governs in every sense of the word. A young lady pines away in secret, and will not be comforted, because her lover has not the countenance of her friends. Confinement, under the influence of excessive affection, has been known to hurt the constitution, and hasten death. If this should not be the case, every means is made use of to inform each other of the state of their mind, and frequently *desperate adventures* terminate in their union, to their *own sorrow*, and the *eternal grief* of their

their nearest relations. But should ladies keep their affections within the bounds of moderation, does it not give them an air of consequence, which does not become persons of their years? Does not dancing lead to a forming connections with different persons; and does not this lead to many idle visits, with a train of evils, against their present welfare, and future happiness?

6. But what motive can induce persons to dance for hours together, who have attained the full exercise of reason? There appears something very irrational in it to me. I am not alone in my judgment on this subject.—The following passage, is quoted from Mr Fletcher's Appeal of Matter of Fact &c. The learning and ability of the author, with his extraordinary piety and usefulness, may be some recommendation of his sentiments on this subject.

After he had given his sentiments freely on several subjects of this nature, he says, ' Let us follow those musical sounds mixed with the noise of stamping, and you will find others profusely perspiring, and violently fatiguing themselves in skipping up and down a room for a whole night, and *ridiculously* turning their backs and faces to each other in a hundred different ways. Would not a man of sense prefer running ten miles upon an useful errand, to this useless manner of losing his rest, heating his blood, exhausting his spirits, unsuited himself for the duties of the following day, and laying the foundation of a putrid fever or a consumption, by breathing the midnight air, corrupted by clouds of dust, by the unwholesome fumes of candles, and by the more pernicious steam that arises from the bodies of many persons who use a strong exercise in a confined place?'

If dancing leads to a sinful wasting of our time; to an injuring our health, and has other evils attending it, can any christian plead its lawfulness before God? That it has other evils attending it is evident. Being heated in the dance, it is necessary to take some refreshment. This is often taken in *haste, without moderation*. The exercise being continued, the blood is inflamed exceedingly; this with immoderate drinking heats the passions, and often has

a fatal tendency to notorious wickedness. Dancing has often ended in fornication and adultery. Perhaps the parties when they first met, were not the least inclined to these evils. They abhorred them in their heart. But the enemy of souls laid his snares on every side with a great deal of art, and led them *insensibly* to the vices I have named. What they were led into insensibly, has *terminated* in an habit of wickedness; to the dishonour of God, the destruction of their own soul, and the grief of their friends.

Nothing can be said to prove the lawfulness of dancing as it is now practised. It is evidently calculated to corrupt the morals of the parties concerned: it is a foolish waste of time and money; and it often ends in the loss of health, and of life itself. There are other methods of teaching young ladies and gentlemen a suitable behaviour. Their time may be abundantly better employed than at a dancing school; or in this exercise, when they are farther advanced in life. There are other ways to relax the mind, and other methods to preserve health.

Let me intreat you that are parents, to watch over your children, as those that must give an account of them to God, when you stand at his bar. Study how you may live here, that when you appear before God in that great day, you may say, *here we are, and the children thou hast given us.* Get your own minds deeply impressed with eternal things. Seek above every thing, to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Study the scriptures, that you may know *what is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you* and your families. Determine to follow the will of God in every thing which he has appointed. Your children may think you severe, if you hinder them from walking in the way that the world contends for. Your neighbours may reproach you as being too strict; but God will give you abundance of his blessing. You may have a number of difficulties thrown in your way; but God will help you to conquer them all. When your children are under your care, and depend on you for their support, you have a right to govern them, according to the views you have of the will of God. While they are under your *particular care and guidance*, you are in a great measure accountable for their conduct. If they should be led to vio-
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late the laws of God thro' your lenity, you will have to answer for this in the day of Judgment. But if you take every method in your power to keep them from sin, and do every thing you can to engage them to serve God, you will be clear at the bar of your Judge. Should they spurn your advice, and follow the counsel of their own will, when they are no longer under your command, their blood will be on their own heads.

Let me intreat you, that are in the bloom of life, *to remember your creator in the days of your youth.* God has given you a min capable of improvement. He has appointed excellent means, which if properly engaged in, will be of infinite service to you. Instead of spending your time foolishly in any diversion, give yourselves to those studies that may be of service to you in future life.

If you are blessed with circumstances that exempt you from labour, determine to spend the time others are obliged to spend in their necessary vocation, in learning every thing, which is proper for persons in your situation. A thousand things offer themselves to your choice, on terms which are easy. Resolve by the grace of God to make *such a choice*, as will be for your present and eternal happiness. Determine in your heart to seek before all things, to know experimentally *the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.* In humble confession of your ignorance and sin, seek wisdom from the almighty: beg of God to give you his Holy Spirit, that by his teaching and the light of the scriptures of truth, *you may be made wise unto salvation.*— Seek with all your heart that faith, that unites the soul to Christ, and *makes us members of his body, his flesh and his bones.* And then resolve to give up yourselves to his service in every thing he has appointed. He will lead you into such a method of redeeming your time, as will make you useful in various ways to thousands in your passage through life. You will have the presence and blessing of God in your death, and be glorified in his kingdom with saints and angels for ever.

If you are in such a situation in life, as requires most of your time to be spent in providing for yourselves, and any that may be connected with you, let not a moment of your leisure hours be foolishly wasted. You have many things

to accomplish, which are necessary to be attended to while in this wilderness. Whither you are in the bloom of youth, or more advanced in years, *make the eternal God your refuge, and he will put beneath you the everlasting arms of his mercy.* If you seek his favour with all your heart, by the faith of the Lord Jesus, God will mercifully accept you among his people, and bless you for ever. He will conduct your steps in his fear through the various changes of your pilgrimage. He will give you grace to act with uprightness in every thing, and will conduct you under the influence of his Spirit in all your ways. Being *diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, your peace will be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.* While your time is bought up to improve your mind in every thing that is necessary for life and godliness, you will *increase with the increase of God.*

O that the Lord Jesus, the friend of sinners, would pour out of his Spirit on us all; that whatever situation we may be in, either in the church or in the world, we may *glorify him in our body and spirit which are his!* May we live in a constant dependence upon him for every blessing we need, and *by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, immortality,* and in the end be blessed with *eternal life!* The Lord grant us these mercies, and to his name shall be ascribed worship and praise for ever! Amen.

THE END.

